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Indigenous Media and Political Imaginaries in Contemporary Bolivia

Gabriela Zamorano Villarreal

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PREFACE

"What do we want?," shouts a male voice over the moving image of a group of lowland peasants heading a march. "The Constituent Assembly!," chants the crowd. While a man waves a flag representing the state of Santa Cruz, two men and a woman carry a large sign that advocates for the Assembly. "When?," the man shouts again. "Nooow!," the multitude responds. The mass of people occupies a narrow downtown street in La Paz. Titles on the screen indicate that this scene was recorded in 2002, when the march organized by the Bolivian Indigenous Peoples' Confederation (CIDOB, Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia) gained stronger attention to their claim for a national constituent assembly in Bolivia. The sequence cuts to another march image, from 2005, this time showing a multitude winding along a road surrounded by an ochre Andean landscape.

These images constitute the initial sequence of *Todos en el camino* (Everybody on the way, 2008), a film documenting the march that peasant, indigenous, miner, worker, and other social organizations made over the course of ten days to the city of La Paz in October 2008 to support the call for a referendum to approve the new constitutional text. This text resulted from the Constituent Assembly process developed from 2006 to 2008. The film was produced by indigenous media makers who took part in the nongovernmental National Plan of Indigenous Audiovisual Communication (Plan Nacional Indígena Originario de Comunicación Audiovisual), an initiative that has worked since 1997 with indigenous

communities and with the peasant and indigenous confederations to produce and disseminate videos that build on their social and political realities.[1] Like many other films produced by the Plan Nacional, this one presents the Constituent Assembly process as an unusual achievement of different sectors' organizations in which indigenous and peasant struggles have played a key role. As in many other Plan Nacional films, struggle, enthusiasm, and unity seem to be motors of social transformation. Altogether, sound, interviews, and images in this film create a sense of coherence and unity, summarized for instance in the image of the crowd composed of heterogeneous groups marching on a single road, which is displayed as the prevailing metaphor of the moment, namely, the unique coalition of divergent social sectors for a common political goal.

During my field research in Bolivia from 2005 to 2007, I witnessed on a daily basis some of the processes through which these kinds of images were crafted not just for producing films but also for advancing a commonsensical idea about an unprecedented participation of indigenous people in national politics and about the presumed positive implications of a plurinational state. Simultaneously, I was able to track some of the tensions that lay behind these celebrated images of unity, for instance, during endless debates that indigenous and peasant unions undertook to write their proposal for the Constituent Assembly (Pacto de Unidad, 2006),[2] or during the negotiations among indigenous media makers about how to fairly depict a gender, territorial, or justice conflict in their films. These tensions, which have become more evident after the initial effervescence around the electoral triumph of Morales, involve the fact that "indigeneity shift[ed] from being a language of opposition to the language of governance" (Canessa 2012, 32).

Inspired by the dynamic relationship between films like the one just described and the political reality of Bolivia, this book analyzes indigenous video production and circulation as one medium through which different indigenous sectors are currently articulating a national language of indigeneity (see Himpele 2008, xv). This study involves the challenge of recognizing how indigenous claims appeal to often contradictory notions of ethnicity, either as a historical legacy of oppression or as an issue of

cultural identity. Bearing this challenge in mind, I analyze the social and political contexts that underlie the production and circulation of indigenous films in Bolivia: Who produces them and why? Who are the intended audiences? What are the implications of labeling this kind of film production as indigenous? How do these images comment on, inform, or transform the reality in which they were produced? And how do they contribute to legitimizing or questioning a new state project that says it represents indigenous peoples' interests?

Early conversations with indigenous media makers and leaders who participated in this study affirmed an extraordinary sense of political possibility and hope. Most people with whom I spoke in Bolivia were convinced not only that important historical changes were taking place but also that they, by their daily actions, were key participants in building the political future of the nation. This book focuses on how indigenous media makers have taken part, with their own communicational work, in normalizing the idea of a stronger indigenous participation in national transformations. Although centered on indigenous media, my analysis builds on some of the consequences of normalizing this idea, namely, the ways in which specific claims about indigeneity acquire more relevance than others for the new government and therefore contribute to reproducing internal forms of stratification.

This study is temporally situated in a complex transitional moment. In less than four years, but of course through longer historical struggles, indigenous people from Bolivia, together with strong worker and peasant movements, managed to topple presidents Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003 and Carlos Mesa in 2005. Indigenous people were also crucial in the electoral triumph of President Evo Morales in December 2005. Morales, together with the Movement toward Socialism (MAS) government, installed a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the national constitution according to indigenous demands and proclaimed the nationalization of natural resources, among other steps, to decolonize state structures and to constitute itself as a social movement's government. The main research for this book took place within the initial two-year period of Evo Morales's government, a moment of intense debate among social organizations and

other civil society sectors specifically about the Constituent Assembly and what many people referred to as the "refoundation of the Bolivian State."[3]

Through an ethnographic follow-up of film production and circulation processes within the Plan Nacional, and through visual analysis of selected productions,[4] I point to the crucial role of indigenous media in adding to political imaginaries, a concept which, as used by Susan Buck-Morss (2002, 12), constitutes a "visual field" of political possibility. From this view, indigenous media forms an innovative feature of political practices by generating spaces for disagreement during film production—a process that I describe as "intervening in reality"—as well as by constructing new audiences through its distribution practices. By referring to the political past, challenging the present, and imagining possible futures, fictional and documentary videos reenact the continuities and ruptures of national political projects in particular ways.

Through a particular case of indigenous media production, this book examines how such reenactments, which constitute political uses of history and ongoing realities, are paradoxically central to both the indigenous movements' claims and the state through current notions of indigeneity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACLO	Loyola Cultural Action (Acción Cultural Loyola)
ADN	Nationalist Democratic Action (Acción Democrática Nacionalista)
AECID	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo)
APC	Plurinational Communication Agency (Agencia Plurinacional de Comunicación)
APCOB	Support to Indigenous Peasants of Eastern Bolivia (Apoyo al Campesino Indígena del Oriente Boliviano)
APG	Guaraní Peoples Assembly (Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní)
ARTECAMPO	Cruceño Handicrafts from the Countryside (Artesanía Cruceña del Campo)
CAIB	Indigenous Audiovisual Coordinating Body of Bolivia (Coordinadora Audiovisual Indígena Originaria de Bolivia)
CAOP	Council of Originario Ayllus of Potosí (Consejo de Ayllus Originarios de Potosí)
C-CAL	Latin American Filmmakers Committee (Comité de Cineastas de América Latina)

CEFREC	Film Training and Production Center (Centro de Formación y Realización Cinematográfica)
CEJIS	Center of Legal Studies and Social Research (Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social)
CENDA	Andean Center for Communication and Development (Centro de Comunicación y Desarrollo Andino)
CEPAS	Episcopal and Social Pastoral Commission (Comisión Episcopal y Pastoral Social)
CESA	Center of Agricultural Services (Centro de Servicios Agropecuarios)
CICOL	Union of Indigenous Communities of Lomerío (Central Indígena de Comunidades Originarias de Lomerío)
CIDOB	Bolivian Indigenous Peoples' Confederation (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia)
CIPOAB	Indigenous Union of Originario People from the Pando Amazon (Central Indígena de Pueblos Originarios de la Amazonía de Pando)
CIPTA	Indigenous Council of Tacana Peoples (Consejo Indígena del Pueblo Tacana)
CIRABO	Amazonic Regional Union of Bolivia (Central de la Región Amazónica de Bolivia)
CLACPI	Latin American Council of Indigenous Peoples' Film and Communication (Consejo Latinoamericano de Cine y Comunicación de Pueblos Indígenas)
CMIB	Union of Indigenous Women of Beni (Central de Mujeres Indígenas del Beni)
CNMCIOB-BS	National Confederation of Peasant Indigenous Women from Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa" (Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa")
COB	Bolivian Workers Central (Central Obrera Boliviana)

COICA	Coordinating Body of Indigenous Communities of the Amazon Basin (Coordinadora Indígena de la Cuenca Amazónica)
CONACINE	National Film Council (Consejo Nacional de Cine)
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador)
CONALDE	National Democratic Council (Consejo Nacional Democrático)
CONAMAQ	National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyo (Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyo)
COPNAG	Trade Union of Native Guarayo Peoples (Central de Organización de Pueblos Nativos Guarayos)
CPEMB	Ethnic Moxeño Peoples from Beni Union (Central de Pueblos Étnicos Mojeños del Beni)
CPESC	Ethnic Peoples from Santa Cruz Coordinating Body (Coordinadora de Pueblos Étnicos de Santa Cruz)
CPIB	Union of Indigenous Peoples from Beni (Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Beni)
CPILAB	Union of Indigenous Peoples from La Paz (Central de Pueblos Indígenas de La Paz)
CRIC	Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca)
CSCB	Union Confederation of Migrant Settlers of Bolivia (Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia)
CSCIB	Union Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia)
CSCIOB	Union Confederation of Intercultural Indigenous Communities of Bolivia (Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales Originarias de Bolivia)

CSUTCB	Trade Union Confederation of Bolivian Peasant Workers (Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia)
FAIS	Indigenous Audiovisual Facilitators (Facilitadores Audiovisuales Indígenas)
FECAR	Union Federation of Agroecological Communities of Rurrenabaque (Federación de Comunidades Agroecológicas de Rurrenabaque)
FECISJ	Special Trade Union Federation of Intercultural Communities from San Julian (Federación Especial de Comunidades Interculturales San Julian)
FEJUVE	Union of Neighboring Committees (Federación de Juntas Vecinales)
FETCTC	Special Federation of Peasant Workers from the Tropic of Cochabamba (Federación Especial de Trabajadores Campesinos del Trópico de Cochabamba)
FMCBBS	Bartolina Sisa Federation of Peasant Women (Federación de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa)
FORMASOL	Solidary Formation (Formación Solidaria)
FSTMB	Trade Union Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers (Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia)
FSUTCLP	Trade Union Federation of Peasant Workers from La Paz (Federación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de La Paz)
FSUTCR	"Vaca Diez" Regional Trade Union Federation of Peasant Workers (Federación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos Regional "Vaca Diez")

FSUTCSC	Trade Union Federation of Peasant Workers from Santa Cruz (Federación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Santa Cruz)
FUTPOCH	Trade Union of Indigenous Peoples Workers from Chuquisaca (Federación Única de Trabajadores de Pueblos Originarios de Chuquisaca)
ICB	Bolivian Film Institute (Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano)
ILO	International Labor Organization
INI	National Indigenist Institute (Instituto Nacional Indigenista)
IPSP	Political Instrument for People's Sovereignty (Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos)
IU	United Left (Izquierda Unida)
MAS	Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento Al Socialismo)
MIP	Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti)
MIR	Revolutionary Left Movement (Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria)
MITKA	Tupac Katari Revolutionary Indian Movement (Movimiento Indio Tupac Katari)
MNCVB	New Bolivian Film and Video Movement (Movimiento de Nuevo Cine y Video Boliviano)
MNR	National Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario)
MSTB	Landless Movement of Bolivia (Movimiento Sin Tierra de Bolivia)
NMAI	National Museum of the American Indian (Museo Nacional del Indígena Americano)

OIN	Native Instruments Orchestra (Orquesta de Instrumentos Nativos)
OITA	Tacana Peoples' Organization (Organización del Pueblo Tacana)
ORKAWETA	Organization of Wenayeek Captainship in Tarija (Organización de la Capitanía Wenayeek en Tarija)
PIB	Bolivian Indian Party (Partido Indio de Bolivia)
PODEMOS	Social Democratic Power (Poder Democrático Social)
THOA	Workshop of Andean Oral History (Taller de Historia Oral Andina)
UDP	Democratic and Popular Unity (Unidad Democrática y Popular)
UJC	Santa Cruz Youth Union (Unión Juvenil Cruceñista)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme (PNUD, Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia, y la Cultura)

INDIGENOUS MEDIA AND POLITICAL IMAGINARIES IN CONTEMPORARY BOLIVIA

Introduction

Indigenous Communication as a Site of Politics

My take on indigenous communication as a site of politics draws attention to the possibilities of filmmaking in producing or transforming social relations. Although this perspective partly involves analyzing how indigenous peoples have adopted media as a tool to put forward their political claims in Bolivia, I am mostly interested in understanding how such processes have also contributed to crafting predominant ideas about indigeneity, or common understandings of who indigenous peoples are and what their rights are within a specific historical moment.[1]

To this purpose, I discuss how the imaginative quality of videos contributes to the generation of political imaginaries and oppositional practices among both indigenous media makers and their publics in the current efforts toward "refounding" the state. This analysis draws from Susan Buck-Morss's take on "political imaginary." Building on the work of Russian philosophers Valerii Podoroga and Elena Petrovskaia, Buck-Morss explains it as "a topographical concept" that implies not "a political *logic* but a political 'landscape,' a concrete visual field in which political actors are positioned" (2002, 11–12).[2] In other words, the political imaginary is "an iconographic, visual representation of the political terrain" (22) that is deeply related to Benjamin's concept of "dreamworld," namely, a "collective mental state . . . that was central to his theory of modernity as the reenchantment of the world" (x) and which, as a collective utopian desire, involves a commitment to envisioning alternative futures. The understanding of political

imaginary as a visual field of possibility allows for grounding visually two aspects related to indigenous communication.[3] One is its definition as a site of "politics," namely, a space that generates debate, negotiation, and disagreement about reality to render material, through film production, into alternative national landscapes that become references for political action toward the future. The second one is about understanding the Plan Nacional as part of a major engagement of civil society—organized into influential social movements—with the national project, with current notions of indigeneity, and with the contentious Bolivian state.

From this perspective, I suggest that indigenous communication does more than document culture and recover indigenous elements to reinforce cultural identities. My argument is that it is a crucial medium for articulating specific forms of political imagination, namely, for materializing political landscapes through audiovisual images. Building on Lauren Berlant's ideas about the role of affect and emotion in shaping political hopes (2011), I argue that the possibilities of audiovisual technologies for publicly mobilizing affects constitute a fascinating site to analyze how imaginaries about indigeneity have gained such a political weight in Bolivia. Such affects weave together personal and political experience but also historical, academic, and political references that have become central to indigenous rights' claims. An example of these references is the mobilization of the Ayllu concept, a traditional Andean form of territorial and political organization that is present in various indigenous films and which was one of the fundamental references of self-determination within the Constituent Assembly process. As Rossana Barragán (2008) points out, the affective and political mobilization of this concept is based both on current community structures in some Andean regions and on international and Aymara academic research on this subject dating from the 1970s and 1980s, which soon became relevant for Andean social movements and organizations.

My study draws from the growing anthropological and cultural studies literature on indigenous media. Since their emergence in the early 1990s, indigenous media initiatives throughout the world immediately caught the attention of academic research, which has mostly documented the

ways in which indigenous peoples use audiovisual media for their cultural struggles. Literature on indigenous media has raised compelling questions about how indigenous film and video challenge the history of ethnographic film in relation to issues such as ethnographic authority and self-representation (Ginsburg 1995b), and about the cultural and political implications of indigenous peoples' uses of film and video technologies (Deger 2006, Dowell 2006, Ginsburg 1992, Hafsteinsson and Bredin 2010, Raheja 2011, Salazar 2004, Smith 2006). Most of this literature assertively proposes to move beyond "textual" analysis of indigenous media to an understanding of their "mediating" function in relation to the context in which they are produced and circulated (Ginsburg 1995a, Ginsburg et al. 2002b, Himpele 2008, Martín-Barbero 1993, Turner 2002).

My understanding of indigenous media as a site of politics builds on these approaches, and I pay special attention to those centered in Latin America. In his study of media circulation in Bolivia, anthropologist Jeff Himpele suggests that by adopting media technologies, indigenous peoples are actively contributing to the overturning of previous indigenist and multiculturalist representations of the Indian (2008, xv, xvii). After addressing this issue, I briefly review how indigenous films dialogue with existing imagery of indigenousness, although I emphasize the contradictions that indigenous media makers face when trying to coherently respond to denigrating or romantic images of the Indian. Himpele also pays attention to how the effective performance of "scenes" or "spectacles" of indigeneity adds to indigenous peoples' greater political visibility (xv, xvii). Building on the questions sketched by Himpele, I examine the impact of audiovisual representations on the advancement of specific ideas about indigeneity in a context characterized by a growing indigenous participation in national politics.

Also interested in the possibilities of indigenous media for social transformation in Bolivia and other Latin American countries, cultural studies scholar Freya Schiwy looks at how media makers contribute to decolonizing knowledge in their efforts "to strengthen indigenous cultures, including modes of knowing and forms of transmitting social memory" (2009, 8–9). She explains indigenous media as a process of "indianizing film," a term

that "refers to the capacity of indigenous cultures to integrate European elements into their own symbolic and social orders" (13). Like Himpele, Schiwy points to the performative aspect of filmmaking as it involves not only representations but also a complex enactment of social relations (13–14). She thus refers to indigenous media practices and representations as cultural politics of decolonization that "cast audiovisual technology as a technology of knowledge" able to challenge the "hegemony" of literacy (14). Through this study, Schiwy adds new insights to understand the complexities of indigenous media practices, for instance, when media makers adopt Hollywood narrative structures for their own films.

Together with Himpele's and Schiwy's, my take on politics through the notion of "intervening in reality" engages the ways in which indigenous media produce social practices beyond textual representations. It is true that the ongoing political transformations in Bolivia inspire the hope of seeing this case as a fertile ground for "decolonizing," or challenging dominant structures at different levels, including media practices. On the other hand, my approach is less confident about the decolonizing possibilities of indigenous media. I contend that, like other indigenous expressions and despite their explicit opposition to colonial and indigenist legacies, indigenous media cannot be dissociated from the contradictions of colonial and state power. In her analysis of indigenous media in southern Mexico, anthropologist Erica Wortham illustrates this point by problematizing the category of "indigenous" in a context in which indigenous media emerged as a neoliberal multicultural state initiative (2013). As a way to go beyond the label of "indigenous," Wortham suggests we understand indigenous media as a "postura," or position from which media makers "make culture visible," aiming at social change both within their communities and at a global scale (10–11). This approach to the postura allows Wortham to document the nuances of self-representation in a Mixe indigenous media initiative in Oaxaca, by analyzing the conflicts that media makers face with authorities and community members when trying to depict issues that they consider relevant for "strengthen[ing] community identity" (147).[4]

Also concerned with how indigenous media contribute to social

transformation, most literature on this topic seems to concur in explaining these media as "cultural activism." This point has helped to bring attention to the significance of indigenous media and, by doing so, as Schiwy and Wortham point out, scholars also add to indigenous media goals of gaining political visibility. Although my study coincides with this aim, it also seeks to bring to light contradictions that perspectives centered on identity politics often overlook.

In an attempt to understand the conditions of possibility of identity politics discourses within indigenous media practices, I examine the processes that lie behind the ascription of an indigenous identity from which subjects often speak and act. For this purpose, I analyze how media makers become ascribed to a specific ethnic identity and learn to speak from it, and how this process is often molded both by their participation and training in peasant or indigenous political organizations, and by their training within the Plan Nacional. Additionally, I discuss how the contents and aesthetics of indigenous films engage with audiences and funders' expectations and with the goal of gaining presence in national politics. I examine these questions through debates that complicate identity politics perspectives by warning against the unexpected institutional appropriations of multicultural claims for state governance (i.e., Hale 2002). I also build on studies about how indigenous peoples learn to make themselves visible in political scenarios, often in contentious collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or state institutions (Ramos 1992 and 1998); about the controversial uses of the concepts of indigenous peoples and indigeneity (Canessa 2012); and about how the mobilization of ethnic identities becomes crucial for navigating the commoditization logics of multicultural capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, Žižek 1997). Although mostly based on multicultural politics, these studies offer insights to reflect critically on the ways in which indigenous identities are being mobilized in the construction of a plurinational state in Bolivia and especially on the role of indigenous media in this process. Considering the limitations of multiculturalism as a notion that explains indigenous peoples as differentiated cultures that can coexist within a nation, Constituent Assembly debates proposed to define Bolivia as a plurinational

state. This definition, instead, understands indigenous peoples as nations that, in addition to their cultural characteristics, have specific forms of political and economic organization whose acknowledgment presupposes the right to self-determination. Specifically, the new constitution explains plurinationalism in these terms: "Bolivia is founded in plurality and political, economic, juridical, cultural and linguistic pluralism, within the country's integration process" (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2009).

From a different perspective, communication studies scholars and media activists suggest rethinking the role of indigenous media as "citizen media," namely, as material sites "where citizenship is forged" in daily political practices (Rodríguez 2001, 158). In terms of circulation, the concept of "counter–public sphere" is also key to explaining how the gradual building of audiences through alternative media allows for building political alliances. Marcia Stephenson (2002) demonstrates this point in her analysis of the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA; Workshop or Oral Andean History), an indigenous academic and political project dedicated to rewriting and spreading history about indigenous peoples through oral methodologies in Bolivia. Drawing from Nancy Fraser's concept of counter-public sphere (1997), Stephenson suggests that it "can be a site for formulating and expressing alternate ways of knowing, thereby legitimizing the cultural and political right to difference" (2002, 101). This sense of counter–public sphere is also insightful for understanding other cases of indigenous media (Schiwy 2009) and community radio, for instance, in the context of violence and conflict in Colombia (Murillo 2003, Rodríguez 2010); the role of popular radio *reporteros* in Bolivia (Huesca 1996) and El Salvador (Agosta 2004); and the political work of popular correspondents in Nicaragua (Rodríguez 1994).

Hence, approaches to alternative media as processes in which citizenship or civil society is forged, for instance, by generating counter-public spheres, are useful for understanding them as political practices that include, though not only depend on, cultural claims or representations. Despite their possibilities for facilitating new kinds of collaboration among different sectors, the generation of counter-public spheres is also affected by class tensions and by the fragility of alliances.